

# **PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW**

**U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – November 21, 2003**

## **NORTH CENTRAL VETERANS**

Veterans in North Central Washington got a boost this week when Congress approved a provision that I added to the Veterans' Health Care, Capital Asset and Business Improvement Act requiring the Veterans' Administration (VA) to develop a plan for meeting the future hospital care needs of veterans living in Chelan, Douglas, Ferry, Grant, Kittitas, and Okanogan counties.

Veterans living in these rural regions of our state often have to travel more than 150 miles to either Seattle or Spokane just to access a doctor. Our veterans deserve the gratitude of our nation, not further hurdles when they return home.

My legislation directs the Secretary of the VA to either:

- Establish a VA hospital locally; or
- Enter into contracts with existing federal facilities, private facilities or private providers for that care.

Essentially, my provision would require the VA to come up with a plan to serve the veterans population of North Central Washington locally, with well-trained medical staff providing basic health and diagnostic services. Medical experts would also make referrals to other appropriate medical facilities.

This legislation is an important step towards addressing our veterans' healthcare needs. I will continue to work on the Veterans' Affairs committee to seek long-term solutions to the serious issue of quality, affordable healthcare for our veterans.

## **TRI-CITIES GET FUNDING**

I am pleased to announce that as a member of the Senate Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee, I helped secure more than \$2 billion for cleanup at Hanford in the 2004 conference report. The health and safety of families in the Tri-Cities depends on a continuing federal commitment to cleanup at Hanford.

I have also secured \$6 million for the Hazardous Materials and Emergency Response (HAMMER) Center. For the second year in a row I have restored funding for this project in the Senate after it was eliminated in the Administration's budget. HAMMER is a national center for training federal, state, local and private emergency response personnel to handle hazardous materials. HAMMER is not just an important priority for the people of the Tri-Cities, but also for emergency personnel across the country.

For more information about funding in the Energy and Water bill please visit: <http://murray.senate.gov>

## **ENERGY BILL DELAYED**

Today, the Senate voted against proceeding with a debate and vote on the Energy bill. I joined with 7 Republicans to vote against proceeding with the bill. I was disappointed that such a massive bill – nearly 1,200 pages long – could do so little to promote our energy independence, national security, economy or environment. In fact, the bill does nothing to protect Washington rate-payers from the price gouging we endured in 2001 at the hands of greedy energy companies like Enron. But that's just the tip of the iceberg.

For over two years the Pacific Northwest has been struggling against the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC) effort to deregulate the transmission system. Unfortunately, FERC had proposed a solution for a problem that doesn't exist in our region. The one-size fits all approach being promoted by FERC would neither work, nor be cost-effective in our unique hydro-power based system.

While the bill delays standard market design (SMD) rule implementation until 2007, it does not permanently stop FERC from ultimately pursuing this power grab, and does nothing to stop regional transmission organizations (RTO) development.

Also of great concern is the bill's failure to deal with market manipulation. The Pacific Northwest and California are still feeling the direct effects of the 2000-2001 energy crisis that we now know was caused, in large measure, by energy companies manipulating prices.

Given the lessons we've learned over the past three years, one would have hoped that this energy bill would aggressively attack these known methods of market manipulation. But that is not the case. Unfortunately, this bill is an open invitation for companies to once again seek to fatten share-holders' wallets at the expense of rate-payers. This is truer now that the bill repeals the Public Utility Company Holding Act without implementing any countervailing laws to protect against abuse in the industry.

The sad fact is that the negative aspects of this bill are overwhelming. It fails to adequately address the real problems that all of us face. It threatens the environmental progress we have made in the past and the progress we hope to make in the future. Without measures that substantively promote responsible energy use, increased conservation, energy independence, consumer protection and environmental safeguards, this bill is simply unacceptable.

## **WORKER TRAINING DESERVES HIGH PRIORITY**

In Washington state and across the country, America's workers have been hit hard by the struggling economy. Our workers need help and they need it now. Unfortunately, assistance for workers in states around the nation is being delayed.

The Department of Labor is responsible for sending grants to states to provide employment training to laid-off workers.

Unfortunately, a study which I requested from the General Accounting Office (GAO) has revealed that nearly 90 percent of Department of Labor grants took over 30 days to process, and nearly half took three months or longer.

These delays are simply inexcusable. The GAO found that delays in releasing these worker retraining grants have caused states to cancel worker training programs. This in turn, hurts both employers who are seeking skilled workers to fill jobs and employees who have been laid-off by the sluggish economy.

I will continue to work in the Senate on behalf of our laid-off workers. As the ranking Democrat on the Senate Employment, Safety and Training Subcommittee, I will continue to work for more one-stop centers and worker retraining grants and – just as I did last week – I will continue to work to extend unemployment insurance for all of our out of work residents.

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